

Bluebells

I've been cycling through Whippendell Woods for over forty years. Through every season; often within the same ride. In the first lockdown – our hourly exercise allowance gave me just enough time to drop down to the canal, curving past the Grove as the original owners wanted it to look like a river flowing serenely through their estate. I'd then circuit the woods and head back up the hill for home.

So, here I am, once more in the dappled shade. Pedals rapidly turn, as I slip, slide, scrunch up the narrow woodland path. I'm the captain of all I survey and at this moment, my prow is cutting through a wide sargasso sea of violet. Wheels and suspension, rock and roll through a vastness of bluebells - that stretch to the dark side of the moon - and back.

I drink in this short window. Next week the flowers will all be gone. I coast through the eiderdown of bluebells. I look across Grove Mill Lane and the golf course towards London's country estate; I remember the old chicken sheds, when they were cleared out, a prayer was offered by those passing, that the prevailing wind would blow in the wrong direction. I pass the dell - originally a gravel pit for the drives to Cassiobury house – now a prominent film location. I once got told off for cycling through the middle of a Star Wars shoot. Liam Neeson found it amusing but some famous director was shouting "Cut, cut, cut" with an apoplectic rage.

Have you seen the psychedelic series Britannia on Sky? They filmed that in the dell. I love it and did stop for that shoot. I spent an age talking to one of the actors who, by the time the programme aired, had become my best mate. That's him I kept on telling the wife – right there – there on the TV – right now.

My bike is now the Millennium falcon on my own Kessel run, passing the scout campsite at light speed. An indigo gillet stretches as far as my eye can focus. It takes my breath away; I've never seen such a show. Cycling helps my mental health. A physical workout, where endorphins spike my consciousness, an unjumbling of the knotted strings of my thoughts. I sometimes get my best writing ideas when out on the bike.

I'm sure that if there were a time-lapse movie of the woods, it would show they haven't altered in centuries. But, is that all about to change? The tower being built on the old Sun Printers' site looms on the horizon. It peers deep into the woods casting a malignant shadow across the trees. At night, the evil eye of the aircraft warning light infiltrates the whole borough.

A muntjac deer scampers away - caught out by my silent approach. Busy trying to process these juxtaposing philosophies, nature or edifice, I find the lowest gear and, heart pounding, hit Jackets Hill as hard as I can. Lungs burning, I dig deep; plumb the depths of my stamina and reach the summit. To catch breath, I freewheel across the golf course, surveying Watford's constantly evolving sky line. A developed presence, concrete monstrosities. Grade one listed buildings have been superannuated. Replaced by more contemporary places of reverence; where football, shopping, the car and good times are more revered than fig trees in churchyards.

Eyesore or eye-catching? From Croxley View to Callowland, Edwardian terraces are soon to be joined by a plethora of high rise living. Is all this now about to be overgrown? Not by Japanese Knotweed but by a forest of skyscrapers.

I return back past The Grove, where corporate team building participants round up geese on an obstacle course. A heron - always perched on the same branch - overlooking the whole debacle. Emulating Queen Victoria, the graceful bird's regal nose points to the water. Disdain or a juicy fish? We bow to each other - we are very much amused!

I pass the old engine sheds that perch high above Hunton Bridge roundabout. Chippies and painters put the finishing touches to the scenery of the latest blockbuster being filmed at the studios.

The afterglow of the ride pulses. It was worth every moment – especially for those blessed bluebells.